



**ANDRÁSSY  
UNIVERSITÄT  
BUDAPEST**



## **Hungary's New System of Direct Democracy: International and National Perspectives**

**International Conference  
Budapest, 9 March 2012**

### ***Invitation***

The political transformation of 1989 opened the way to different forms of direct democratic participation in Hungary – as it did in other countries of the Central Eastern European region as well. Since that time Hungarian voters have expressed their opinion six times on altogether twelve questions within the scope of national referendums. Popular vote decided for example in 1989 that the new president of the republic should be elected by the new, freely elected multi-party parliament and not by the last representative assembly of the one-party state. National referendums ratified Hungary's access to different organisations of the Euro-Atlantic Integration (1997: NATO, 2003: EU). In 2004, unsuccessful popular votes were held on the prohibition of the privatization of state-owned health care institutions and on granting Hungarian citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living abroad. In 2008, a referendum abolished the tuition fee for higher education and fees for certain types of medical treatment. The debates which occasionally flare up around popular votes, the contrasting views, the decisions of the constitutional court on various initiatives, the modifications of constitutional and legal regulations all show that the role and function of direct democratic instruments in the Hungarian parliamentary system have not yet been clearly defined. Furthermore, the new Constitution of Hungary also leads us to discuss the questions of Hungarian direct democracy because the new "Fundamental Law" significantly modifies the regulation of national referendums; namely it raises the threshold of validity and thus cuts down the possibility of popular participation compared to previous regulations.

In course of the conference we would like to examine and evaluate the last two decades of development concerning direct democracy in Hungary and its new regulation in the light of Central Eastern European direct democratic experience, and to reveal tendencies and perspectives which may have an influence on the international and national evolution of popular participation.

Budapest, 3 January 2012

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#### *Programme*

#### **10:00-12:00 Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Dean's Councils Room)**

- Overview on European and regional developments (normative and practical perspectives)  
Ellen Bos (Chair)  
Theo Schiller: *Origins of Direct Democracy – the Background of Conflict and Transformation*  
Krisztina Arató: *European Citizens' Initiative – towards a More Democratic European Union?*  
- Coffee break -  
Zoltán Tibor Pállinger: *Direct Democracy in Europe: Current Discussions*  
Discussion

#### *Lunch*

#### **14:30-17:00 Andrassy University**

- Direct democracy in Hungary, history, past experiences and prospects  
Maté Szabó (Chair)  
László Komáromi: *Milestones in the History of Direct Democracy in Hungary*  
Zsolt Enyedi: *Elite- and Mass-perceptions of Referendums and of Representative Democracy in Hungary*  
- Coffee break -  
Lóránt Csink: *Tendencies of Direct Democracy in Hungary – Referendums in the Light of the New Basic Law*  
Discussion

#### **18:00 Panel Discussion – Andrassy University**

- Krisztina Arató, Benedek Jávor, Theo Schiller, József Szájer
- Reception

*Please indicate your attendance at the Panel Discussion and Reception  
via e-mail to [tunde.bokor@andrassyuni.hu](mailto:tunde.bokor@andrassyuni.hu) until 7 March 2012 at the latest!*



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### ***Short Report***

The main objective of the conference was to comment on Hungary's experience with referendums in light of the new regulation introduced by the new Fundamental Law of Hungary taking into consideration both international and national perspectives of the use of direct democracy. Accordingly, the European normative and practical environment was examined in the scope of three papers in the morning session at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of Pázmány Péter Catholic University. The three papers were presented by Theo Schiller (Philipps-Universität Marburg, Institut für Politikwissenschaft), Krisztina Arató (Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Law, Institute of Political Sciences) and Zoltán Tibor Pállinger (Andrássy Gyula German-Speaking University Budapest, Faculty of International Relations). In the afternoon session at Andrassy University three papers – presented by László Komáromi (Pázmány Péter Catholic University Faculty of Law and Political Sciences PPCU FLPS), Zolt Enyedi (Central European University, Department of Political Science) and Lóránt Csink (PPCU FLPS) – concerned Hungary's direct democratic experience and perspectives with reference to the new regulation. The sessions were chaired by Ellen Bos (Andrássy University) and Máté Szabó (ELTE Faculty of Law). At 18:00 a panel discussion was held at Andrassy University on the role of direct democratic instruments in Hungarian political life with the participation of József Szájer (FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Union), Benedek Jávor (LMP), Krisztina Arató (chair) and Theo Schiller. The conference papers and the material of the panel discussion is planned to be published in conference proceedings.